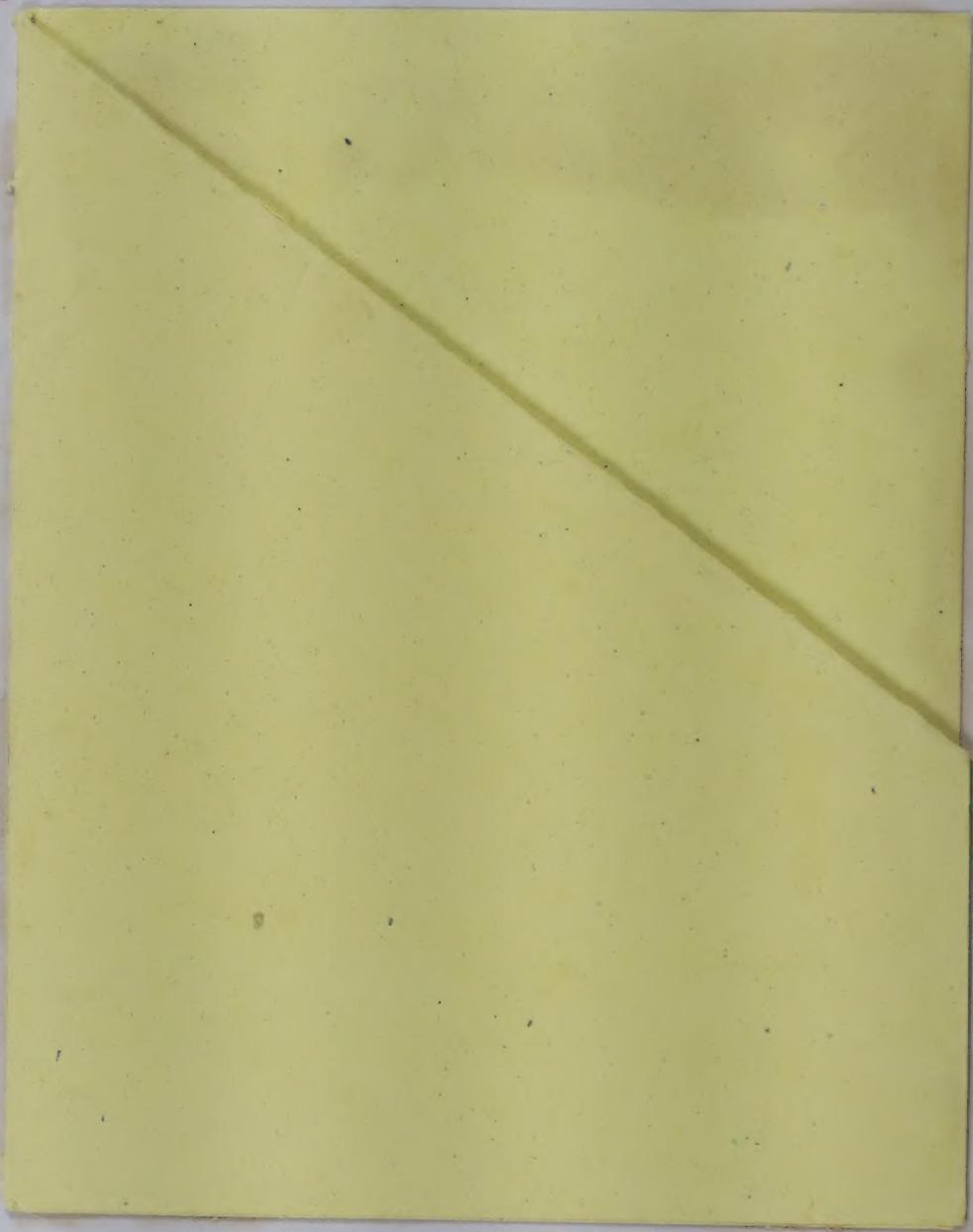


# **CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM**

**CBCI Commission for Development,  
Justice and Peace  
NEW DELHI**

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### FOREWORD

The CBCI Commission for Development, Justice and Peace, through its Secretariat, Caritas India, has embarked upon a major animation programme, particularly through seminars and conferences in different parts of the country. The relationship of Christianity with Marxism is an issue that is frequently raised. As a contribution to a better understanding of the various dimensions of this relationship, the Commission offers the present documentation. We hope that it will prove helpful not only to those participating in seminars organised by Caritas, but also to others, especially our students, who are fired with the desire for an authentic Christian social action.

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March 25, 1951,  
Feast of the Annunciation

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# CHRISTIAN FAITH AND MARXISM

*Pastoral Letter of the  
National Catholic Bishops' Conference (U.S.A.)*

## Preamble

Our Holy Father, John Paul II, has stressed incessantly the responsibility which Bishops have to be teachers in the Church. To fulfil this mandate our teaching must be rooted in the Word of God, shaped by the tradition of the Church and responsive to the questions, issues and currents of thought which move the spirit, the intellects and hearts of men and women of our day.

In this pastoral letter we have chosen to address a topic of the highest import for the Church in our time, *the relationship of Christian faith and Marxism*. We are conscious of the complexity of this topic, of the different forms the issue takes in the diverse cultures of the world and of the fact that several other Bishops' Conferences and the Holy Father himself have addressed this issue. Even though the question does not appear to have the urgency or interest in the United States that it has in other parts of the world, Marxism nevertheless challenges us intellectually, morally and politically. Above all, it challenges the content and the practice of our faith.

We are not blind to the *horrendous violations of human rights* perpetrated in the name of communism or the invasions of the territorial integrity of sovereign nations. Previous documents of the U.S.C.C. such as the one concerning religious liberty in Eastern Europe (May 4, 1977) have addressed some of these crimes.<sup>1</sup> But the present document deals with the theory and practice of Marxism/Leninism as they generally affect the Christian view of life and the respect for human rights in our time. It deliberately avoids discussing political, economic and military actions taken by Marxist regimes in

various parts of the globe, however important we consider these actions to be.

Through this pastoral letter the U.S. Bishops wish to take a stand on a question that preoccupies a sizable portion of the American intellectual community and that daily confronts millions of people all over the world. Such a document is, by its very nature, forced to consider the issues in their full complexity and cannot be satisfied with blanket endorsements or condemnations. In adopting this method we follow the example set by the Holy See in recent encyclicals as well as by Catholic hierarchies in other countries in pastoral letters on Marxist Communism.<sup>2</sup> In fulfilment of our teaching ministry to guide and strengthen the faith of the People of God we present this letter, not as a polemical or political tract, but as a Christian reflection on the Marxist world view. We hope to have shed light rather than heat on questions which touch the thought and practice of Christian faith, and we urge you to study this document in the spirit in which it was written.

In its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II admonishes the Christians of our time: "It is the task of the whole people of God, particularly of its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine Word" (*Gaudium et Spes*, § 44). One of the most powerful voices is undoubtedly that of Marxist communism. Radically secular in origin and belligerently anti-religious in its development it once drew its followers exclusively from dechristianized circles in our society. Recently, however, communist leaders in Italy, Spain, France and some parts of Latin America have begun to invite religious believers to join their movement while fully maintaining their religious convictions. Many, including priests and religious, have given credence to the promise of ideological freedom in the socialist society of the future. With this conciliatory policy Western communist leaders resume earlier attempts to persuade believers of the compatibility of their party policy with Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time communist governments in Eastern

Europe, particularly in Poland and Hungary, in order to avoid paralyzing conflicts, have entered into dialogue with the Church. A certain *modus vivendi* with the secular authorities has emerged that allows the Church to exercise its pastoral functions in return for restraining from all political intervention. The Holy See itself has for some years been pursuing political agreements with various Eastern European governments—the so-called Ostpolitik—in order to secure for Christians at least a modicum of religious freedom.

The new situation confronts millions of Christians with momentous decisions. Recent papal teaching, from *Pacem in Terris* to *Redemptor Hominis*, has reexamined again and again the constantly shifting attitude of Marxist parties toward the Church. National episcopates in countries where the matter requires immediate attention have already issued pastoral letters to guide the faithful in an increasingly difficult choice. We in the United States have not felt the practical urgency of the new encounter. Marxism in our country presents mainly an intellectual movement most visible in scholarly publications. The existing communist parties seem to exercise but little attraction on North American Christians. Even so we must not remain indifferent to what has become a vital and daily concern to a very large portion of the human race.

We therefore wish to convey our own pastoral reflections on this and to reexamine both the sources and the recent developments of the Marxist movement in the light of the Christian tradition. It is, of course, impossible to take account of all the variants in Marxist theory and practice, significant as they may be. But, as Pope Paul VI reminded us, it would be "illusory and dangerous" to forget "the intimate link which binds (these variants) together" (*Octogesima Adveniens* § 34). What is needed, above all, is the kind of cautious discernment that allows us to recognize what unites and what separates the two principal world views of our age. Can a Christian in any way cooperate with the Marxist movement without jeopardizing the integrity of his or her faith?

A first distinction, indispensable for correctly evaluating

the Marxist movement in its origins as well as in its later development, is the one between theory and practice. John XXIII alluded to its significance when he wrote in *Pacem in Terris*:

"Neither can false philosophical teachings regarding the nature, origin and destiny of the universe and of man be identified with historical movements that have economic, social, cultural or political ends, not even when these movements have originated from those teachings and have drawn therefrom (§ 159)".

Clearly Marxism is less a logically coherent theory than a system of action of which theory forms an essential but subordinate part.<sup>4</sup> The political and revolutionary activity of the working class toward social-economic emancipation determines both practical value and theoretical truth. The theoretical principles of the movement are based upon an historical practice. Rather than a philosophy, then, Marxism is, by its own account, a social movement that, inevitably though freely, emerges from the economic conditions of industrial capitalism, and that, in the course of its development, creates the theoretical structures necessary to legitimate and support its practical activity. Such at least was Marx's concept of the social struggle.

Meanwhile, however, Leninist Marxism, especially in countries where it has gained control over the State, has developed a set of principles that, far from following actual practice, rather dictates it in all areas of social and cultural life, according to the interpretation of a single authoritative body—the communist party. Yet, since those principles have been abstracted from Marx's and Engels' writings, these writings, despite their different perspective, remain the principal basis for a discussion of the compatibility of the Christian and the Marxist world views.

## I. Two World Views

That the world view underlying the Marxist movement differs profoundly from the Christian conception of life requires no argument. The question is, rather, whether the

difference is so fundamental as to exclude any meaningful dialogue. To decide this we must compare the two views on such crucial issues as the nature of man, of his alienation in the present and his redemption in the future.

#### A. *Marxist and Christian Humanism*

Marxism as well as Christianity claim to be rooted in a respect for the dignity of the human person. Yet, clearly, the two conceptions of humanism are radically different. In the Christian vision the person is *sacred*. The relation to God constitutes an integral part of the person's very being. To be a person, to the Christian, is to be a living image of God, to be intrinsically dependent on a transcendent reality, to manifest a divine presence in the world. In short, to the Christian, the person is a living relation to God. This divine character of the person constitutes both the content and the principal effect of God's revelation in Christ. Such a transcendent dimension is obviously absent from a Marxist view of human nature. Strangely enough, some well-meaning Christians today tend to question Marx's overt and unambiguous atheism. Marx, they say, rejected only "idols", that is, spurious symbols of transcendence; the religious dimension itself was never at stake in his polemics with traditional faiths. Such a presentation misleadingly over-simplifies the case.

It is true enough that the belligerent atheism which prevails in most communist countries cannot claim Marx's authority. Indoctrination or practice directly aimed at the suppression of religious beliefs conflicts with the general trend of his theory. Marx taught that the revolutionary ought to direct his activity at the social situation which religion merely *expresses* and attempts to justify. To attack religion itself rather than the conditions which produce it, is both ineffective and wrong according to Marx. Religion mythologizes human alienation: it does not *constitute* it. The emancipation of the person takes more than abolishing religion.

What should be attacked are the social-economic conditions that drive people to religion. Indeed, the presence

of the religious illusion is a living protest against an inhuman life. In an essay of his early period Marx uses the famous expression that religion is the opium of the people. Yet he adds immediately: "The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of men is a demand for real happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is *the call to abandon a condition which requires illusion*".<sup>5</sup>

Marxists have pointed out that this is not an outright rejection of religion. As an expression of human misery and an implicit protest against it, religion criticizes the structure of society. It raises the right questions, even though it offers the wrong answers.<sup>6</sup> Even this benign interpretation of Marx's position fails to provide a legitimate basis for the continuance of religion in the future society. Indeed, it does not even justify its present existence. For in Marx's view, the religious way of questioning weakens the oppressed's resistance to their present condition by directing their hope toward a future, otherworldly happiness.

So, even as an expression of social protest, religion can only slow down the advent of the communist society. The first step toward a solution, therefore, would consist in abandoning the wrong manner of posing the problem. Yet the abandonment of religion is merely a precondition and not, as Marx's atheist friends believed, the solution itself. Communism is much more than atheism, even though atheism is a preliminary requirement for it. "Communism begins from the outset with atheism; but atheism is at first far from being communism; indeed, that atheism is still mostly an abstraction".<sup>7</sup>

It is small comfort to religion that Marx considers it an authentic cry of distress if he does not take seriously the content of this cry. For Marx religion is a symptom of social disease, not an articulate symbol. Whatever truth the symptom contains will disappear with the disease. Marx's distaste for speculative atheism is due not to a more open attitude toward religion, but to his conviction that such an atheism misinterprets the origin of the believer's illusion. Atheism attempts to cure the symptoms without eradicating

the disease, namely, man's social-economic condition. Theism will never be compatible with a free society, according to Marx, yet neither is atheism sufficient to produce such a society. To unmask the religious "deception", we must be clear about the question: What causes man to deceive himself religiously? No atheist philosophers ever seriously attempted to answer that question. If they had, "the critique of heaven would have been transformed into a critique of earth".<sup>8</sup>

A full reappropriation of what man has alienated from himself cannot be achieved by a mere annulment of God, but only by an annulment of the social structures that produce the need for God. To be effective atheism must be supported by communist reform. "Atheism being the supersession (overcoming) of God is the advent of theoretical humanism, and communism as the supersession of private property is the vindication of real human life as man's possession and thus the advent of practical humanism".<sup>9</sup> Soon after he wrote these words Marx found the definitive expression for his critique of religion. Henceforth, he would refer to religion as an *ideology*, that is, "an ideal expression of the ruling material relations", that has no meaning or development of its own, but merely reflects the material conditions of production.

Every ideology is characterized: 1) by a dependence upon the more elementary forms of consciousness that direct economic production and its social structures; 2) by an illusory consciousness of independence that distinguishes it from a true, scientific consciousness (such as Marx's own social critique claims to be). It is this illusory character that makes religion intrinsically false. A critique of religion, then, should consist above all in a critique of the illusory consciousness in general—not in a critique of particular dogmas or beliefs. As Marx later noted on the text in which he exposed this theory: "Religion is first and foremost consciousness of transcendence".<sup>10</sup>

Both in rationalist atheism and in religion, theoretical constructions have become detached from their real social

basis. In Marx's view, speculative atheism, no less than religion, overlooks the *practical* origin of ideas, of the idea of God as well as of its own critique of it; and mistakes for independent, logical conclusions what, in fact, primarily reflects social conditions.<sup>11</sup>

But has Marx's outright rejection of speculative atheism not opened at least the possibility of a religious perspective? Before raising any hopes on this basis we should consider that the same argument which disposes of speculative atheism also disposes of religion. Any mode of consciousness which fails to recognize that it is rooted in, and determined by a particular social form of production, lacks the very basis of truth according to Marx. But in his religious attitude the believer claims to go beyond this social basis altogether. To Marx the person is both a "natural" and a social being that in the process of creating itself through its own productive activity brooks no interference from any transcendent source. Even the question, "How did man and nature originate?", is meaningless for him, since it assumes as non-existent the very act from which all intelligible existence derives. The range of intelligibility does not extend beyond the human practice. Through its unpredictable and ever greater achievements the human race constantly makes and remakes itself.

The theory developed by Marx's followers deviates considerably from this absolute primacy of concrete social and political action. They elevate materialism and atheism to the status of independent speculative principles. Thus for Engels and Plekhanov (an early Russian Marxist) religion is "bad science" that must be refuted rather than left to wither away of its own accord (as Marx had held). With Lenin this theoretical struggle against religion adopted a virulent practical character. What Marx had considered a spontaneous side effect of unsatisfactory social conditions, Lenin regarded as a poison, deliberately administered for sinister social purposes by the bourgeois class. Thus Leninist communism took the harshly polemical attitude toward religion expressed in base, anti-religious propaganda and in the innumerable harassments that have reduced the Church in most of Eastern Europe to a Church of silence with no other voice but that

of suffering.<sup>12</sup> Even in its early more tolerant form the Marxist attitude toward religion modelled itself after Prometheus, the mythical hero who attacked the gods and whose defiant words in Aeschylus' tragedy Marx placed as epitaph above his doctoral dissertation: "In one word, I hate all the gods...".

The Christian vision has incorporated the relation to the transcendent which Marx so clearly rejected into its very concept of the person. Its humanism is vertically open: as a relation to God as well as to himself man shapes his own destiny in dependence upon the God to whom he owes his origin as well as his entire creative activity.

### B. *Alienation and Sinfulness*

As fundamental as his concept of self-creation is Marx's critique of a social-economic condition that in his view has estranged the person from an authentically human existence. According to Marx, bourgeois society has detached objects from the person's creative freedom. Giving preference to *having over being* has sacrificed genuine socialization to effective methods of exchanging products. Already in his early writings (Paris, 1844) Marx had defined "alienation" as a social condition derived from a particular mode of production that separates the workers from the fruit of their work and, consequently, also from their own vital activity expressed in this production. Under those circumstances industrial labour debases the person instead of humanizing him, as work should do. Rather than expanding the person's cultural and social horizon it demands him to the kind of primitive struggle for survival that excludes any genuine relation to others. In his early days, Marx saw this alienation institutionalized and perpetuated in the unconditional right to possess and acquire private property. Later he stressed other aspects of which he considered capitalism's single-minded concern with maximizing the exchange of commodities. Thus he denounced a division of labour controlled by productivity regardless of its effects upon the producer. In *Capital* Marx refers to a civilization in which commodities have become ends instead of means by the religious term "fetishism".

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Through the enormous interest generated by the re-discovery of Marx's early writings his concept of alienation has entered the mainstream of social thought. Nearly every contemporary critique of our culture has incorporated it in some way or other. The popularity of the term is due to the fact that it expresses, though with increasing vagueness, a serious flaw in the very orientation of our culture. Even our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II in his first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, partly appropriates Marx's critique when he writes:

"The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so, of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will. All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is not only subjected to 'alienation', in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, but rather it turns against man himself, at least in part, through the indirect consequences of its effects returning on himself. It is or can be directed against him. This seems to make up the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadest and universal dimension" (§ 15).

It is impossible to deny the inhumanity of a system that aims exclusively at producing as much exchange value as possible, without any regard for the ultimate effect its products may have upon the workers, the consumers and the natural environment.

But a radical social critique must also confront the question: What induces people to adopt attitudes that result in such destructive social-economic systems of production? The existential sadness hidden in this question does not vanish with the optimistic predictions of a better future. Those who adopted such attitudes and created such structures were persons endowed with the same inclinations as we are and future generations will be. No structural revolution can entirely cure a disease that is man himself. It is to this deeper distortion, this disposition to the inhuman and even the anti-human, that Revelation addresses itself. The

Christian faith, as most religions, has always interpreted the fundamental estrangement of the person from his or her humanity as an alienation from God.

Its vivid awareness of a deeper, more substantial, evil must not be interpreted as a lack of concern for the immediate, social-economic problems that beset the lives of millions of our contemporaries. For almost a century papal encyclicals have dealt more with questions of social justice than with any other topic. Again and again the Supreme Pontiffs have warned against the uninhibited pursuit of economic gain. Already Leo XIII in his momentous encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) asserted that work should not be regarded as a mere commodity, since it is the only source from which men draw their livelihood (§ 34). Moreover, unregulated competition, the Pope adds, threatens the person's dignity and elementary well-being. Even private property, though a natural right, must not be used without consideration for the welfare of others. Forty years later Pius XI repeated those principles with even more emphasis in *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931). Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* adapted them to the new, intensively socialized world of our own day, insisting upon the priority of the common good not only in a particular region or nation but in the world community as a whole. In a *unified* world aid to less economically developed regions is not merely desirable—it is a social duty. In *Populorum Progressio* Pope Paul VI made an exceptionally strong appeal to the social conscience of our contemporaries, stating that "the common good at times demands the expropriation of an estate if it happens that some estates impede the common prosperity either on account of their vast size or because of their small or negligible cultivation, or cause extreme poverty to the population or bring serious harm to the country" (§ 24).

These documents unambiguously show how deeply the Church has been concerned with the social problems of our time. In no way do they detract from Marx's merit in having clearly, though not always correctly, formulated the problems resulting from the discrepancy between economic development and social structures in an advanced industrial society.

One need not agree with Marx's interpretation of capitalism, and even less with the methods he advocates for accelerating social change, in order to recognize the major significance of his words and of the movement he created in drawing worldwide attention to the urgency of the social question.

On the other hand, any interpretation that restricts the human predicament to a single, well circumscribed problem, soluble through structural changes alone is bound to be dangerously one-sided. Even to expect the solution of all human suffering or all social injustice from revolution or social reform is to prepare oneself for bitter disillusionment. Moreover, such a view is likely to disregard entire areas that are essential to an integral human development. In its very concrete concern for the "wretched of the earth" the Church has always refused to reduce its message to the single task, however crucial, of creating social justice and harmony. In any human "alienation", including the social one, the Church insists on searching out and addressing the even more fundamental estrangement of the person from the source of all good. She considers all negative experiences of the human condition expressions of our separation from God—our sinfulness.

By no coincidence was the earliest meaning of the term alienation religious: it referred to the person's estrangement from the sphere of Absolute Being. This awareness of a more general, existential condition of alienation should not dispense the faithful from committing themselves to remedying with all possible means social-economic as well as all other forms of human suffering. Many Christians of the last centuries may well deserve the Marxist charge of a lack of serious social commitment. Yet their indolence is not supported by the principles of their faith. To acquaint oneself with the *authentic* Christian attitude one should look at the heroic devotion to others displayed by the saints, not, or not exclusively, at the ever present mediocrity of the ordinary. St. Francis Cabrini, St. Elizabeth Seton, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Peter Claver, St. John Bosco, as well as some heroic women and men in our own day, are social reformers as

well as spiritual leaders. But they, and all who take Christ's precept of charity seriously, refuse to reduce the entire message of the Gospel to a call to social reform.

It is out of a more realistic awareness of a total condition that requires redemption, not out of a lack of social concern, that the Church rejects a revolutionary interpretation of salvation. Social revolution or reform are not sufficient to redeem the entire person. Our contemporaries have generally not been much disposed to consider their condition as affected by radical evil, and even less to interpret this evil in terms of sin. However pessimistic their outlook on the present state of affairs may be, most people's view of human nature appears amazingly optimistic. Throughout all the disasters of the modern age they have clung to a naive belief in technical and scientific progress, and even in an overall improvement of the human condition.

The teachings of the Church transcend such passing moods of the time. The Gospel, as Pope Paul VI wrote, does not yield to any illusions about the natural goodness of the person nor to any despairing resignation to the incurable corruption of human nature (*Ecclesiam Suam* § 61). Through the ages the Church has insisted that we live in an imperfect state from which only God's grace can redeem us. To those who witnessed the collapse of the ancient world with the demise of the Roman Empire, the Christian message sounded incredibly optimistic. To those living in recent centuries when history came to be equated with progress, the warning of fundamental sinfulness appeared gloomy. Today in the aftermath of unprecedented wars in which millions were slaughtered, and at a time when the impact of the technology that continued to nurture the belief in progress has become dubious in many of its achievements and prospects, a more sober state of mind, once again, invites us to question the uncritical optimism of the recent past.

In that light we are no more disposed to believe that social-economic reform than that technical inventiveness can cure all the ills of the human condition. We repeat, the more realistic view of human nature expressed in the Chris-

tian message conveys no mandate to inertia. The beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, the model of Christ's own poverty and love of the poor, as well as the countless women and men who in each of the twenty centuries of Christianity have dedicated their lives to the assistance of the destitute, the care of the sick, and education of the children without allowing themselves as much as the joy of a personal home —these are eloquent witnesses enough of Christ and his Church's real and practical concern for the down-trodden.

Even now dedicated Christians are daily risking their lives in some areas of the globe for the sake of gaining some elementary social justice for their brothers and sisters. But they did so and they do so in a constant awareness of that deeper need for salvation of which the Gospel speaks. Without this transcendent perspective social experiments all too easily turn into power structures that, unconcerned about the individual, generate more human misery than they relieve.

### *C. Marxist Eschatology and Christian Hope*

But Marxism is more than a critique of the present: it offers, to the poor and the humble of this world, a confident prospect of hope. Underneath the appearances of a closed, economic theory, Marxism hides a vision of an ever expanding future in which gradually all human faculties will be allowed to develop their limitless potential.<sup>13</sup> Liberated from the present social-economic oppression we will uninhibitedly develop our humanity. This ideal of human emancipation beyond anything we can conceive today has incited thousands of Marxists to sacrifice their lives for the anticipated well-being of later generations. Some have seen in this powerful vision of an ideal future an unavowed religious Messianism, others a secularized eschatology.<sup>14</sup>

It is undoubtedly this "spiritual" character that accounts for much of Marxism's uncommon appeal and that distinguishes it from all other political movements of our time. From the beginning Marx's theory has been a powerful catalyst of mankind's utopian aspirations. The religious idea of the poor who through their suffering would in the end

bring redemption to all the people, forcefully combined with the dialectic of history, undoubtedly played a significant role in the Bolshevik revolution. Today even Marxist thinkers have come to recognize the religious sources of their vision of the future and some have attributed a unique social significance to what they consider to be the utopian nature of religion. Only the bold eschatological visions of Judaism and Christianity are, in their opinion, sufficiently detached from the bonds of the present to give form and shape to the aspirations of their own revolutionary ideals.<sup>15</sup>

Yet precisely as a spiritual phenomenon Marxism, for all its clear affinities, stands at the opposite side of Christianity. The Marxist ideal of a surpassing future intrinsically differs from an object of Christian hope that goes beyond our future achievements as well as our present ones. Marxist transcendence is a form of *self-transcending*: it remains within the scope of human attainment. Christian transcendence consists in being assumed into an order totally beyond the reach of human endeavour. To the Marxist the ideal future contains more than man can conceive today, but not more than he will achieve tomorrow. To the Christian the promised future descends as a gift from God's mercy.

Atheistic socialism has been described as a heresy of Christianity. Today it has become its most insidious transformation. Its own earthly spirituality has seduced many a Christian to reinterpret the kingdom of God into a worldly realm of social harmony. In fact, contemporary Marxism appears as the final stage of a secularizing movement that, begun more than two centuries ago, has gradually substituted the search for the absolute with the search for adequate social structures. Its secularized vision attempts to *comprehend* in its totality what the Christian view left open to transcendence.<sup>16</sup>

The seriousness of those differences should not allow the Christian community to neglect the lessons it can learn from its most redoubtable adversary. In his responsibility for shaping the future of humankind, the Marxist constantly reminds Christians that our transcendent perspective by no means dispenses us of a wholehearted commitment to the

building of the City of Man. All too often Christians are faulted with a certain indifference toward earthly projects, as if one could not fully count on us for radical social reform. The charge may be unfair, but the danger is real enough. Our hope in another life must not be allowed to seduce believers into neglecting our task in the present one.

## II. Ends and Means

While the basic views of Christianity and Marxism on the concept of the person, the nature of the present and the expectation of the future fundamentally disagree, they nevertheless retain a sufficient common basis for fruitful comparison. Regarding the means, however, which the Marxist movement has traditionally advocated for attaining its goals, its opposition to Christian practice appears irreconcilable. Communists have always considered a polarization between social classes necessary for achieving a more equitable social system. They consider revolution, even violent revolution, an indispensable instrument of social progress.<sup>17</sup> Such a polarization of class opposition is unacceptable to the Christian. Indeed, as Leo XIII pointed out (*Rerum Novarum* § 15) the Christian cannot even accept the assumption that one class is the natural enemy of any other class. To be sure, human beings tend to attribute what they consider evil or undesirable to another race, nation, class or any group other than their own. But experience should inform them that such a view, though conveniently relieving their own moral responsibility, is seldom justified. Christians have a right and a duty to fight injustice. We may even have the duty to do so by strong means when all others fail, but we have no right to regard any person or group as a permanent enemy. Indeed any movement that claims to achieve social harmony by means of unmitigated class struggle should naturally arouse our suspicions.

In refusing to accept class war as the only possible means for achieving social justice the Christian does not deny the all too real existence of those actual class antagonisms that result from both a blatantly unequal distribution of material possessions and a tenacious, often violent defense by the possessing classes of their privileged position. As the

Roman Pontiffs have repeatedly emphasized in their recent encyclicals, and as accepted Catholic morality has always taught, whenever a person or a group are deprived of their basic necessities, expropriation is justified.<sup>18</sup> In such extreme case the poor have not chosen social warfare: it is imposed upon them by the injustices of the possessors. Yet even then there is no sufficient ground to consider all those who belong to the ruling class as their irreconcilable enemies.

The recent guidelines of Pope John Paul II in Mexico and Brazil have clearly defined the rights but also the limits imposed upon the efforts of the oppressed to redress their wrongs; nor do these limits prevent Christians from effectively participating in the struggle for social justice. No one who has followed the recent social movement in Latin America can claim in good faith that the Church merely serves as an instrument for support of the established social-economic system.

The real difference between Marxists and Christians in the social struggle lies in the absence or presence of unconditional moral restrictions. Marx's social-economic concept of history admits no moral norms extrinsic to social practice. The point is not that Marxist theory rejects currently existing moral systems in favor of a different one. It simply declares any definition of good and evil by absolutes, that is, non-historical criteria, "ideological" reflections of a particular social state which the ruling class in its attempt to preserve them, presents as absolute. "There is no recognition of any right of the individual in his relation to the collectivity; no natural right is accorded to human personality, which is a mere cogwheel in the communist system" (Pius XI: *Divini Redemptoris* § 10). Individual deeds must be judged exclusively by their conformity to what Marxists declare to be the inescapable course of history. The only "moral" attitude consists in actively cooperating to facilitate and accelerate the development of the social-economic laws of history. Immoral is what slows down this development, that is, concretely, what delays the working class from carrying out its historical mission of establishing a classless society. No moral absolutes exist. No deeds are intrinsically evil—whether violent

expropriation, incarceration, or even, when revolutionary action requires it, execution; all must be judged by their relation to ultimate social-economic "progress". Clearly such a theory of historical necessity undermines the very foundations of morality.<sup>19</sup> As history has shown abundantly, the practical consequences are equally disquieting.

We do not doubt the moral courage of many marxist men and women. But the issue is not whether individual Marxists are more moral or less moral than others. The real issue is whether the theory itself allows a scale of values according to which certain acts are prescribed and others forbidden under all circumstances. Marxism has not developed the kind of moral absolutes that are essential to a Christian worldview. Choices in matters of life and death cannot be left to any individual's interpretation of "the direction of history", even less to the wisdom of a political party. The memory of the millions of persons deported, imprisoned, "liquidated" for political reasons, the continuing, constant violation of basic human rights, the conquest and submission of sovereign nations, that characterize Soviet history prove that our concerns are not unfounded; nor has the contempt for human rights been restricted to the past nor to a single regime. These acts, it is often said, were temporary deviations in no way representative of communist practice. But even if all political crimes could be dismissed as past errors (which they cannot), nothing in the system itself prevents them from occurring again. That the violent policy of the past has proven to be less effective than the more moderate one of the present, is not a sufficient ground for allaying our apprehensions.

The absolute priority of effective social action over theory may well, in the end, be Marxism's most questionable principle. For it denies the very possibility of a normative order beyond the one created in and through man's productive activity. Revolutionary praxis recognizes no preexisting standards and admits no ulterior judgment. No natural bond restricts man's appropriating activity; no inherent structure calls for a specific mode of behaviour; no natural law derives from the very *nature* of the person and of the world any

rules of right action. Society and the natural world are no more than conditions of human activity: they have lost all normative character. The transforming process is the only absolute. Instead of answering the fundamental questions of ends and means, reason is reduced to a purely instrumental, technical role. Rather than *directing* activity it merely functions as an instrument of that activity. It fails to question whether the goals of that activity are themselves rationally justified, because it lacks the norms for ultimate questions.

### III. Practical Conclusions

At the end of this letter we return to the practical issues that confront Christians in their relation to Marxism : the possibility of cooperation, the extent of resistance. Religious beliefs are clearly incompatible with Marx's theory as *he developed* it. The self-sufficient dialectic between the person and nature, vertically closed, yet horizontally expanding without limits, excludes what is the very basis of the religious awareness, namely that dimension of experience by which we know ourselves to be passive and absolutely dependent. We possess no evidence that modern forms of Marxism have seriously modified their position on this crucial issue. Even George Marchais, the secretary-general of the French Communist Party, repeated in the very address in which he invited Catholics to join him:

"No tactical reason will ever induce us to water down what distinguishes our theory from others or to seek the impossible and illusory philosophical agreement. Communist theory is based upon Scientific materialism".

Yet this inherent atheism should not discourage the educated Christian from seriously studying a theory which so overtly conflicts with his faith. As we have pointed out, much in communist theory stems from our own religious heritage. Conversely, the impact of Marxism on faith contains a lesson which the Christian would do well to heed. For the secularism that Marxists so openly profess has imperceptibly affected our whole culture to the point where it influences its entire manner of thinking and valuing. Living

in such a cultural climate religious believers cannot but profit from openly confronting a secularism that has surreptitiously infiltrated their own lives.

Both Pope Paul in his encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (§ 104) and Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes* (§ 19, 20) declared atheism to be the most serious problem of our time. It affects believers as well as unbelievers and has become a general characteristic of modern culture. It is not sufficient, then, for the Christian to denounce atheism as the fundamental error which it undoubtedly is. We must also attempt to understand how it was able to convince so many of our contemporaries. In attempting to do so, Christians will have to confront their own often deep-seated secularism.

Must the opposition between Marxist theory and Christian doctrine always remain antagonistic? It is impossible to give a definitive answer to this question, because its essentially practical orientation forces Marxism to adapt its doctrine constantly to historical developments. Until now Marxist theory has positively excluded any kind of transcendence. But is it possible that in the future a change in praxis may result in an open humanism and a genuine respect for the other dimension of man's existence? Such a change would undoubtedly transform Marx's entire theory. Yet the possibility, unlikely as it appears today, cannot be ruled out. Theory in Marxism is never primary, and hence a change in practice would eventually force theory to follow.

Both Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI entertained the possibility that the communist movement might undergo radical changes in its attitude toward religion, even though the doctrine has been defined in uncompromisingly atheist terms (*Pacem in Terris* § 54; *Ecclesiam Suam* § 199). Some political parties in Western Europe already claim to have accomplished a shift towards religious neutrality. In his October 1977 reply to Bishop Luigi Bettazzi's inquiry about the anticipated communist policy toward the Church, Enrico Berlinguer, secretary of the Italian communist party, stated:

"We use Marxism critically for teaching. We do not read it like an immutable text. Now from its large legacy of

ideals and cultural orientation, you ask, have we fashioned a party that will impose a specific ideology and atheism in political life and in the State? My answer is 'no'...We want to construct a lay and democratic State that is neither theist, atheist or antitheist!'.<sup>20</sup>

Thus far those professions of democratic openness have had no occasion to be tested. It is too early to decide whether Western communist parties have decisively broken with the anti-religious heritage of Marxism-Leninism or whether they are merely making a temporary concession to the political realities in which they operate. Yet we cannot but wonder whether communist parties can abstract from their unique world view without losing their distinctive character altogether. At this time we follow the development of Eurocommunism with open-minded interest, hoping that at least it may constitute a lesser threat to the Church than the old style communism. Meanwhile Leninist communism continues to dominate Europe and to display its traditional, unmitigated hostility toward any religion that refuses to submit itself entirely to the high authority of the government.

Still the ideological outlook of the communist movement is not the only factor that determines cooperation on the part of Christians. In some areas of universally human concern collaboration with communist governments or communist parties has become a practical necessity. Due to the socialization which Pope John XXIII recognized as one of the distinctive characteristics of our time, modern life requires the cooperation of all men and women of good will. *Citizens of a world united by unrestricted technology and instant communication, yet devoid of an effective international authority have no choice but to seek common approaches and concerted action in attacking global problems.*

Pope John XXIII devoted the entire pastoral section of his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* to this issue:

"Today the universal common good poses problems of worldwide dimensions, which cannot be adequately tackled or solved except by the efforts of public authorities endowed

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with a width of powers, structures and means of the same proportions: that is, of public authorities which are in a position to operate in an effective manner on a worldwide basis. The moral order itself, therefore, demands that such a form of public authority be established" (*Pacem in Terris* § 137).

The Church recognizes the depth and dimensions of the ideological differences that divide the human race, but the urgent practical need for cooperative efforts in the human interest overrules these differences. Hence Catholic teaching seeks to avoid exacerbating the ideological opposition and to focus upon two problems requiring common efforts across the ideological divide: keeping the peace and empowering the poor. Conscious of the great delicacy and complexity of keeping the peace in the age of nuclear deterrence and proliferation, the Supreme Pontiffs of the past four decades have, again and again, turned their attention to the question of war and peace. John XXIII insistently appealed:

"Justice, then, right reason and humanity urgently demand that the arms race should cease; that the stockpiles which exist in various countries should be reduced equally and simultaneously by the parties concerned; that nuclear weapons should be banned; and that a general agreement should eventually be reached about progressive disarmament and an effective method of control" (*Pacem in Terris* § 112).

The efforts to control the proliferation of arms, however, ought to be a work of true cooperation, aimed at effective control of the nuclear arms race in all its dimensions. Moreover, the Christian's obligation to work for world peace does not require that he cease to recognize the right to autonomy of nations or national groups that have been illegitimately deprived of their freedom.

In *Populorum Progressio* Paul VI focussed on the question of the global poor. In his words, the new name for peace is development. The ideological divide and the great danger of nuclear war has been principally an "East-West" question. The line between social wealth and poverty, in contrast, runs between North and South. Neither East nor

West has responded adequately to the needs of the poor in the Southern hemisphere. Yet solidarity with the poor has become a duty for the richer nations of an interdependent world:

"Their obligations stem from a brotherhood that is at once human and supernatural, and take on a three-fold aspect: the duty of human solidarity—the aid that the rich nations must give to developing countries; the duty of social justice—the rectification of inequitable trade relations between powerful nations and weak nations; the duty of universal charity—the effort to bring about a world that is more human towards all men, where all will be able to give and receive without one group making progress at the expense of the other. The question is urgent, for on it depends the future of the civilization of the world" (*Populorum Progressio* § 44).

It is in these two perspectives—maintenance of world peace and eradication of global poverty—that North American Catholics are most immediately confronted with the task of cooperation with Marxist regimes.

In engaging in practical and humanitarian dialogue two points require their serious attention. First, in judging social and political situations in other parts of the world they should avoid identifying the essential principles of the Christian doctrine of society with our own social-economic structures, and even more, with the theories of economic liberalism. In defending those structures or theories as the only acceptable ones to the Christian they impose them in cases where they have, at best, a limited application and could, at worst, lead to grave social injustice. Indeed, Catholics should remain aware of the very severe judgment which the Roman Pontiffs and various European hierarchies have passed on unrestricted economic liberalism.

In *Quadragesimo Anno* Pope Pius XI referred to the liberal theory of uncontrolled competition as a "poisoned spring" from which have originated all the errors of individualism. The French hierarchy commenting upon the same Pope's letter on communism stated:

"By condemning the actions of communist parties, the Church does not support the capitalist regime. It is most necessary that it be realized that in the very essence of capitalism—that is to say, in the absolute value that it gives to property without reference to the common good or to the dignity of labour—there is a materialism rejected by Christian teaching".<sup>21</sup>

The second point is of a more practical nature. In past contacts with the poor of this world North Americans, especially American Catholics, have traditionally displayed a generous attitude in sharing some of their wealth with others. Yet this exercise of traditional charity, in evidence even to our day, has often not been matched by a sensitivity to the deeper requirements of justice which touch the very political and economic structures through which the United States relates to the developing world.

In addition, our obsessive consumerism that leads us to use up a far greater share of the earth's resources than any other country in history, makes poorer nations look upon us as the wastrels of this world. It is not merely envy but rightful indignation about our spending habits that accounts for the little friendship we generally receive from the poorer nations. Such habits are particularly objectionable in the followers of him who had no stone on which to rest his head. They greatly weaken our credibility in dealing with the poverty of the world. By indulging in such habits the most powerful nation in history, and perhaps the most generous of its age, fails to provide the example and moral leadership that others, especially those living in oppression and misery, rightfully expect from it.

Whatever else may distinguish us from those who are forced to live in a political system based upon the principles of dialectical materialism, it certainly is not the absence of materialist attitudes. Yet a sober and responsible life style would be more effective than anticommunist propaganda in dissuading the uncommitted from joining the Marxist camp. When Pius XI claimed that there would be neither socialism nor communism if the rulers of the nations had not scorned

the teachings of the Church, he undoubtedly implied that sober-mindedness and control of our natural greed of material possessions are an essential condition of social justice (*Divini Redemptoris* § 38). In his first encyclical, when surveying the state of the Church and the need for reform Pope Paul VI wrote, as one of his primary concerns:

'We consider that the inner freedom which is derived from the spirit of evangelical poverty makes us more sensitive to, and more capable of understanding, the human aspects of economic questions, by applying to wealth and to the progress it can effect the just and often severe standard of judgment that they require, by giving to indigence our most solicitous and generous attention, and finally, by expressing the wish that economic goods be not the source of conflicts of selfishness and of pride among men, but that they be used in justice and equity for the common good and accordingly, distributed with greater foresight' (*Ecclesiam Suam* § 57).

November 12, 1980

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(Text provided by the National Catholic News Service and reproduced in "Atheism and Dialogue" of the Secretariat for Non-Believers)

## FOOTNOTES

1. "Today, human rights in many places in the world are severely restricted. While no nation is faultless in the defense and promotion of human rights, we are obliged to note two recent statements by Episcopal Conferences—the Bishops of West Germany and of Poland—deplored the denial of the human right to religious liberty in Eastern Europe.

It is especially at the level of the individual believer that the infringement of the person's human right to practice his or her religion is most insidious, since in all of the East European countries atheism is supported by the full apparatus of the state. For example, membership in a Christian community disqualifies one from becoming a teacher, a civil servant or an official in the government. In some situations, even visits to the sick and the administration of the sacraments to the dying require prior official permits. Conditions are especially severe in Lithuania where the Church is subjected to constant and intense persecutions". (USCC Statement on *Religious Liberty in Eastern Europe*; Washington, 1977).

2. A recent editorial in the influential Catholic monthly *Civiltà Cattolica* (October 18, 1980) interprets the position of the Church as follows: "The Church condemns the atheism, historical and dialectic materialism, the class struggle, the reduction of man to 'homo economicus' (an economic being), the purely earthly quest for 'heaven on earth'. ... But it does not condemn values like the aspiration to justice and the overcoming of social and economic situations which allow the exploitation of men by men; the aspiration to create a more just and fraternal society; the consideration in which work is held and, even more, the preeminence given to the poorest classes of society; the commitment to fight for the betterment of social conditions of humanity; the importance which economic and social structures have in creating and maintaining great human masses in conditions of inferiority and underdevelopment".
3. In his historical address of October 26, 1937, the secretary of the French Communist party, Maurice Thorez, had reminded Catholics that Leo XIII had denounced economic injustice "in almost the same terms as Marx's *Communist Manifesto* had used half a century earlier", while his successor, Pius XI, on the fortieth anniversary of that encyclical had criticized "economic liberalism" as strongly as any communist ever had. Why, then, should

Christians not join Marxists in their struggle for a better world, if they were given assurances of full freedom of conscience as well as the right to grant their children a religious education? At that time (1937) the prevailing policies in the Soviet Union cast some doubts upon the sincerity of promises of religious tolerance made by a party that remained unconditionally loyal to Stalin's regime. The climate of freedom in which the Euro-communist leaders repeat their invitations today gives their promises a far greater credibility. In 1976 George Marchais, Thorez's successor pointed out that the religious situation in France would be intrinsically different from that of Eastern European countries where the Church, he claimed, had been traditionally connected with the old order. "We will never declare war on religion", he promised.

4. Paul VI likewise distinguishes 1) the active practice of class struggle; 2) the exercise of political and economic power under the direction of a single party; 3) a socialist ideology based on historical materialism; 4) a rigorous scientific method of examining social and political reality (*Octogesima Adveniens* 33-34).
5. "Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (1844). The same metaphor had been used by other writers before him, not always in a pejorative sense. Rousseau speaks of religion as a sedative that should be used with moderation in *Julie, ou la nouvelle Héloïse* (Bk VI, 8), while Holderlin writes of the religion of the philistine: "His so-called religion has no more effect on him than an opiate". In an anonymous pamphlet written by Marx's friend Bruno Bauer with possible collaboration by Marx himself, the same metaphor appears.
6. French party secretary George Marchais comments: "Religion here is not merely the expression of the distress of the poor; it also protests against that distress". *Communistes et chrétiens. Communistes ou chrétiens.* (Paris 1976) p. 31. Also: Roger Garaudy: *From Anathema to Dialogue*, trans. Luke O'Neill, Herder, New York 1966, pp. 89-90.
7. Marx-Engels: *Collected Works* International New York Publishers, 1974, 3, p. 297.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 176.
9. *Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts* (1844); in *Collected Works*, 3, p. 341.
10. Marx-Engels: *Werke* Dietz-Verlag, Berlin 1976, 3, p. 54.
11. Of those "scientific" interpretations that fail to view religion in its social-economic setting Marx wrote in a later edition of *Capital* I: "Any history of religion that makes abstraction of this material

basis is itself not critical. It is, indeed, much easier to discover through analysis the earthly core of the misty formations of religion than to do the opposite, namely, to develop on the basis of the vital, real relations of life, their cloudy forms". Marx-Engels: *Werke*, 23, p. 392.

12. Cf. Pope Paul VI: *Ecclesiam Suam* 61.
13. In the preparatory notes for what was to become *Capital* Marx wrote: "When the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces, etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working out of his native potentiality with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e., the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick". *Grundrisse* (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 488.
14. Pope Pius XI referred to it as "a false Messianic idea" (*Divini Redemptoris* 8).
15. Cf. for example Ernst Bloch: *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1959, and Roger Garaudy: *From Anathema to Dialogue*, Herder and Herder, New York 1966
16. Cf. Friedrich Gogarten: *Verhangnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit* (1958) 1966; Hannah Arendt: *On Revolution*, p. 159-60; also Eric Weil: *Die Sakularisierung der Politik*, in *Marxismusstudien* IV, p. 144-162.
17. Recently some communist parties in Western Europe have claimed to abandon all non-democratic means for obtaining and maintaining political power. This entirely new position still awaits the confirmation of an actual victory and a subsequent defeat at the ballot-box.
18. Cf. John Paul II: Address to Rural and Peasant People (Oaxaca), *Origins* (VIII, 34), 8 February 1979; Paul VI: *Populorum Progressio*, 24.
19. Cf. the sharp analysis of Leszek Kolakowski, at that time a leading Marxist theoretician, in *Toward A Marxist Humanism*, Grove Press, (New York 1969), p. 122.
20. *Rinascita* (October 14, 1977) Comments in *L'Osservatore Romano* (October 17, 1977).
21. Anne Freemantle, ed., *The Social Teaching of the Church*, Merton-Omega Books, New York 1963, p. 105.

## CHRISTIANS AND "MARXIST ANALYSIS"

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In the light of recent attempts by Christians, particularly in "third-world" countries, to come to grips with the socio-economic inequalities under which the vast majority of the people in those countries labour, there has arisen a question which, despite its abstractness, needs to be answered, if the Christian consciences of those who seek to alleviate the oppressive conditions under which so many of our fellow humans live are to be satisfied. One way of putting the question is the following: "Is it licit or not, or under what conditions is it licit, to adopt marxist analysis (or the method of marxist analysis) as distinguished from marxist philosophy or ideology, and even from marxist political theory?" Put this way, however, the question immediately raises a number of difficulties not readily solved. The first difficulty concerns the meaning of the expression "marxist analysis"—nor can the difficulty be resolved by resorting to a definition of that which cannot be defined. Just when is any analysis specifically "marxist" and not simply commonsense analysis—stimulated, perhaps, by an acquaintance with marxist thought? The second difficulty involves the question of whether or not it is possible to separate in any meaningful way the method of analysis from the philosophy which undergirds it. The third difficulty is that of giving an abstract answer to an abstract question, when the real question is whether any given attempt by Christians to employ marxist methods has proved to be legitimate.

It may well seem that my first difficulty is the result of a tendency on my part to quibble over words. I do, however, think that clarity demands that terms not be used loosely. There is no such thing as "analysis" (or "marxist analysis") *tout court*. All analysis is *Analysis-of*, and the legitimacy or

illegitimacy of analysis depends to a great extent on *what* is being analyzed, as well as on the *manner* in which (or the principles according to which) it is being analysed. There are a number of marxist analyses, and if they are to be evaluated —apart from an evaluation of marxist philosophy itself (and even that demands a number of distinctions)—each must be evaluated separately. There is for example, the marxist analysis of "capital" (here too a distinction must be made between a *descriptive* analysis of a process which has taken place and is still taking place and a *dialectical* analysis of a process which could not have taken place in any other way). In addition, we have a marxist analysis (whether it be Marx's own or that of contemporary Marxists) of contemporary society, of religion, of political structures as such, of economic relationships as such, of human reality, of "alienation", and on-and-on. The question, then, has changed. It becomes necessary to ask whether a Christian can licitly accept one or more of these analyses while rejecting others. Even granted that the expression "marxist analysis" usually means marxist social analysis, the question still remains as to when such an analysis is truly "marxist" or when does it simply employ *some* of the elements which characterize marxist analysis. If, for example, an analysis looks at general patterns, causal relations, or linkages of injustice in society as we know it, does that justify us in calling the analysis "marxist"? The mere fact that one is dissatisfied with contemporary oppressive socio-economic structures, seeks to analyze the forces which brought them about, and wishes to take steps to change those structures radically, does not make one a "Marxist"—even if one's vocabulary might resemble that of a Marxist.

It can, of course, be argued that all marxist analyses are united into one, because the basic principles of analysis are the same in all. But, that is to say that the unifying principles of marxist analysis are the principles of marxist philosophy (dare I say, of Marx's "metaphysics"?), and once more the question has been changed. There is no evaluation of marxist "analysis" without an evaluation of "dialectical (or historical) materialism". To put it another way: for the sake of argument it might be granted that a Christian could

licitly engage in an analysis, let us say of capitalism or of contemporary society, which bears a certain family resemblance to "marxist analysis", but could this analysis be legitimately called "marxist", if it is not based on marxist philosophical principles? A further question might be whether an analysis which does not issue in marxist *praxis* (whose legitimacy is another question) is marxist at all.

I am convinced, obviously, that marxist analysis, if it is to be truly "marxist" and not a baptized descriptive technique, is inseparable from marxist philosophy (whether it be the philosophy of Marx himself, its dogmatization by Engels, its politico-ideological fixation by Lenin, or the various attempts on the part of contemporary "liberal" Marxists to make it more palatable). As I see it, then, marxist interpretation of whatever makes any difference to human beings involves a number of characteristics, without any one of which an interpretation will not be authentically "marxist" no matter what those who employ it may want to call it. 1) The interpretation must be materialistic and naturalistic; 2) it must be "historical"; 3) it must be based on the conviction that the fundamental facts of human existence are economic; 4) it must inculcate "class consciousness" (which is meaningful only if there is an essential antagonism of classes); 5) it must be revolutionary. Allow me to enlarge to some extent on each of these points.

1) Marxist interpretation of human reality must be materialistic and naturalistic. Marx, as we all know, was the avowed enemy of all "utopian" solutions to the socio-economic—and, therefore, political—situation of the world in which he lived. Explanation and solution were, for him, inseparably linked, and they had to be "scientific" in the only sense in which he could understand that term. It has been argued that Marx's atheism was simply "methodological" and not necessarily "metaphysical" in the sense that all problems of human existence had to be solved *as if* the question of God was simply not to be asked. With regard to Marx himself I seriously doubt that contention; for him it was imperative to get God (and, therefore, the supernatural) out of the picture entirely. It can still be argued, however, that Marx's atheism is not essential to "marxist analysis".

I doubt that the same can be said of his materialism and naturalism; without it the "science" of human development would itself be a utopian dream. The question, then, is whether an analysis which is essentially materialistic and naturalistic must also be atheistic.

2) The interpretation of human existence must be "historical". At the very least this means that the human situation at any given time (for Marx this meant "capitalist" society) had to be seen both as the culmination of a historical process and as merely a stage in an ongoing process which could culminate only in a "classless society". Marx's historical criticism is extraordinarily acute, and as a descriptive analysis of what has *de facto* taken place in the course of history it has much in its favour. Description, however, is not "science", and so the process had to be clothed with a mantle of inevitability. There were "dialectical laws" inscribed in the nature of things (by no one!), independently of all human thought on the matter, which dictated the entire course of events—including the revolution which would put an end to (was already putting an end to) the capitalist form of society. Although Marx himself was more tentative than his followers in employing the category of "the historical", his thought permitted Engels to give the green light to subsequent marxist ideology by stating that the categories of "good or evil" were not operative in marxist analysis—only "historical or unhistorical".

Marxist interpretation of history is based on the conviction that the fundamental facts of human existence are economic. Although it is naive to say that this conviction constitutes a theory of "economic determinism"—which a "marxist analysis" could scarcely escape—it is nevertheless true that Marx saw the positing of an economic base as the only way to make both his explanation and his solution "scientific". In a sense, then, this point is but a corollary to the first point: only if the fundamental human activity is the material activity of fulfilling material human needs can there be a "science" of human activity and, therefore, of human development, human history. This does not necessarily mean that a Marxist must deny the reality of spirit; it does mean that he must see spirit (whatever that can mean for him) as

the *result* of a natural (material) process, not as its *source*. Because the dialectic of need and fulfilment is based on the two premisses that *a*) every authentic need inevitably engenders—dialectically—its own fulfilment and *b*) every fulfilment engenders another need to be fulfilled, the entire spiritual “superstructure” of human achievement can be accounted for in a marxist framework, a framework difficult to baptize. Lest it be thought, however, that religion itself is a human achievement which fulfils an emergent human need in the process of history, Marx assures us that the need of religion is from the start an “illegitimate” need, the need for a palliative—“opium”—to make “alienation” bearable; and the root of all alienation is economic.

4) Authentic interpretation (analysis) of the human situation must be such that it inculcates “class consciousness” in that segment of society which is exploited and oppressed by that other segment of society which wields the power to determine the form society takes—at present, those who privately own the means of production. Fundamental to Marx’s critique of society—and of its economic, social, and political structures—is his contention that the task of the authentic critic, whether that be the philosopher, the whole of the proletariat, or the “party” is not to “criticize” society but to “change” it. All history, however, bears witness to the truth *a*) that social change can be brought about only by economic means (even the political is but a function of the economic), and *b*) that the dialectical law which dictates history demands that the agent of change be the “class” which, as oppressed, is brought into being by the operation of the laws which govern that form of society which cries out to be changed. It is not individuals simply as individuals, however, who are oppressed, “alienated”. It is a whole class of individuals in a society who are “alienated” and their alienation is symptomatic of the alienation of the whole society. But, a class is not a class—it is only a segment of society—until it is conscious of being a class, which means consciousness of having collective interests which are diametrically opposed to the interests of that other class which determines the form of the society in question. The class as a class must be conscious of being what it is,

and the individuals who make up the class must be conscious that they are members of the class whose interests demand the complete restructuring of the society.

5) Marxist analysis must be revolutionary. It seems hardly necessary to enlarge on this; it is but a corollary to all that has preceded. The point, however, is that "dialectically" only revolution can ameliorate the situation in which society finds itself. Other critics can and have seen and deplored what Marxists see and deplore. If, however, these other critics want to better the situation by "reforming" structures, they are doomed to failure : *a)* because all re-form leaves the form of society, with its essential alienation, intact; and *b)* because reform is not dialectical and, therefore, not authentically historical.

It might be asked at this point : why go on at such length to explain what is already well known ? The answer is that it is important for me, before considering the question of legitimacy, to give my interpretation of "marxist analysis" (and in this sense my interpretation has been all too brief and condensed). It is fairly clear, I think, that under each of the points I have made there are some elements which a Christian can legitimately accept—even act upon—and other elements which a Christian simply cannot accept. Whether a Christian who accepts only some elements and rejects others can really be said to "adopt marxist analysis", or whether those Christians who in the concrete have adopted marxist analysis have in practice also accepted the unacceptable, I leave to others to judge. It does seem to me that, in the abstract, one can legitimately separate the acceptable from the unacceptable under each heading. Whether, in the concrete, it works that way, I at least tend to have doubts. It could, of course, be argued that those Christians who, in the concrete, adopt "marxist analysis" do not see my analysis of that analysis as necessarily accurate. If this be the case then each attempt to adopt "marxist analysis" must be judged on its own merits.

1) As I see it, then, a Christian not only can but should agree with Marx that a "utopian" solution to the ills of society—which ills are very real—is no solution at all, if by

"utopian" is meant unrealistic. We can agree that efforts to bring about the realization of a pre-conceived idea of what society ought to be are likely to be contaminated by the arbitrariness of the ideal upon which the efforts are predicated and, perhaps, by an ignorance of history. We can also agree to seek to determine, in as scientific a way as is possible, the causes of the situation in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. What a Christian cannot do is to commit himself to a framework of naturalistic and materialistic explanation and solution; nor can he adopt a "marxist analysis" which commits him to such a framework. I very much doubt that an analysis which is not committed to this framework can intelligibly be called "marxist" except in a very attenuated sense of the term.

2) There can be no question that a Christian not only can but must recognize that *de facto* socio-economic categories are "historical", in the sense that they are not inscribed in the nature of man or of society but come into existence in the historical course of human activity. It is here that the acuteness of marxist *descriptive* analysis can prove very valuable. When, however, the mantle of "science" is thrown over this analysis, the analysis becomes not only religiously unacceptable but also philosophically nonsensical. If it goes so far as to make the ideological categories of "historical vs. unhistorical" the only categories operative in the overall process of human development, it becomes practically dangerous, a green light to violence, oppression, and slavery. By no means, however, does this mean that the system under which we all live is not subject to serious criticism. It is imperative, too, that the criticism be authentically historical. Nor should the Christian be limited to criticism in thought and word; *action* is essential—although it is doubtful that the action called for should be what "marxist" action has turned out to be.

3) It is also true to say that no Christian can interpret history on the basis of fundamental economic facts *alone*. It would, nevertheless, be both blind and criminal for a Christian to ignore the significance of economic facts in shaping the structure of society. We can and must recognize

the economic character of historical phenomena. History can no longer be written from a point of view which sees historical facts as merely political, military, cultural—or religious. If those who in our contemporary world determine the destiny of the vast majority of mankind have as the primary goal of their activities economic values, they are to be fought ceaselessly, even if some of the weapons in the fight are taken from the marxist arsenal, provided that Christians are critical in the choice of these weapons. It is to be feared, however, that "marxist analysis" too, despite pious cliches about "disalienation" of the whole of mankind, is guided by economic values. It is not at all clear that the economic betterment of mankind is synonymous with the human betterment of man. Speaking negatively it can be said that economic facts have played a major role in bringing us to the situation in which we live. This does not mean that a change in these economic facts alone will provide a solution to the situation. For the Christian the interior conversion of human beings is the key to undoing the structural injustices of society. For the Marxist the restructuring of society is the key to the conversion of human beings (to what?). Both, it is true, can work toward a restructuring of society.

4) It may be that only in a "classless society" (if that is a concrete possibility at all) can the ideals of peace, harmony, and cooperation for good be realized. It may also be true that the common interests of mankind are inextricably bound up with the interests of the oppressed in the world. It is still doubtful that the marxist concept of "class" (which is an essentially antagonistic concept) or that the inculcation of "class consciousness" can ease the antagonistic tensions which plague the world today. The conviction that the path to "disalienation" lies here is but a corollary of the demand that all explanations and all solutions be naturalistic and materialistic. Granted that the rights of all human beings will be recognized only when the rights of the oppressed have been fully recognized—and realized—and granted that a certain solidarity among the oppressed (a Christian message from the beginning) is a necessary means to this end, it is still not true that a Christian can see all this only in terms of "class struggle". The marxist concept of "class" was manu-

factured by Marx himself, and it is only as valid as the materialistic metaphysics on which it is based, which no Christian can consider valid.

5) It is hardly necessary for a Christian to deny that a "reform" of society in which oppressive structures are left intact is not a solution to the alienation of man and society. No Christian need fear to be "revolutionary"—if seeking to change the structures which a whole society takes for granted is "revolutionary", then Jesus Christ himself was a prominent revolutionary. The question, however, is not of revolution; it is of the *kind* of revolution that is envisaged. Those Christians who contend that marxist revolution can be separated from marxist ideology bear the burden of proof that this can be so. Perhaps they are advocating what they do not even understand, in the light both of the failure of many churchmen to come to grips with concrete socio-economic issues and of the dedication and willingness to sacrifice exhibited by so many Marxists.

This brings me to my last point and to what, I think, is the real question. The abstract question, "Is it licit for a Christian to adopt marxist analysis" is not really the issue. The question—and perhaps it is the only question that needs to be answered—is a factual one: has any of those Christians who in fact have adopted marxist analysis adopted a licit analysis? It is a question which I obviously cannot answer! I have not read them all. One who tries to answer this concrete question must ask himself two questions in regard to the analysis being examined: a) is the analysis legitimate, or has it succumbed to one or other of the pitfalls outlined above? b) is the analysis, if legitimate, truly a "marxist" analysis or only superficially so? My own reading leads me to conclude to the second alternative in a); at least in the long run those who adopt "marxist analysis" seem to move on to adopting marxist "ideology"—innocently, I am sure. But, innocently or not, in many parts of the world Marxism (or Leninism or Maoism) has turned out to be not an elaboration of but a substitute for Christian faith and the power of the Gospel. As for b), if the analysis in question is

merely superficially "marxist" the original question has been erased—Christians have not "adopted" marxist analysis; they have adopted only what rather superficially *passes* as "marxist". In any event, a Christian should not have to live in fear of being labeled "marxist", just because he opposes what Marxists too oppose.

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